JOLIET JUNIOR COLLEGE

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

JAMES CHULLY

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JOLIET JUNIOR COLLEGE

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Birth and Background ---------- 5

Schooling ---------- 6

School Activities ---------- 7

Crime and Prohibition ---------- 8

Industries ---------- 9

Employment with City of Joliet ---------- 10

Unions and Working Conditions ---------- 11

Growth of City to West Side ---------- 13

Joliet's Ethnic Groups ---------- 15

Politics ---------- 16

The Mayors and City Improvements ---------- 17

Streets: Cleaning, Lighting, Maintenance ---------- 18

Mayor Hennessy ---------- 20

Hospitals ---------- 22

Footnotes ---------- 23

Index ---------- 24

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INTERVIEWEE: Mr. James Chully

INTERVIEWER: Samuel Guardiola

INTERVIEWER: This is an interview with James Chully for the Joliet Junior College Oral History Project by Samuel Guardiola at Mr. Chully's home at 821 Woods Avenue, Joliet, Illinois, on March 7, 1977, at 1:00 p.m.

GUARDIOLA: Jim, how would you like to start out by telling us about your past history of the . . .?

CHULLY: Well, I was born in Joliet in 1908. I lived here all of my life, and I worked for the city of Joliet for 25 years on a truck, maintenance, and when we first started with the city of Joliet, we didn't have all the equipment we have today. We had a small spreader. Now we have a larger quantity of trucks and more equipment. And another thing, we've had improved was snowplows. We never had snowplows, we only had four when I started to work for the city of Joliet. The bridges were put in when Mayor Hennessy was mayor of the city of Joliet, back in twenty . . . fifty-two years ago, no, they were put in in '52 -- all the bridges. And the Ruby Bridge was put in last and I think that was one of the greatest bridges that they had in the city of Joliet. I think all these other bridges are kind of raised, and I don't think it's very good myself.

GUARDIOLA: Could you tell us about your childhood? What kind of a neighborhood did you live in?

CHULLY: I lived on the east side of Joliet up there on Meeker Avenue till I was married.

GUARDIOLA: How was your neighborhood, was it a rough neighborhood, or. .?

CHULLY: No, we had one of the nicest neighborhoods up there. Nothing was bothered. Nobody bothered anyone. If there was anyone needed help, the neighbors were always willing to help us. And I lived there till I got married in 1934. Then I moved to Florence Avenue, Joliet, Illinois, and from there I moved to D'Arcy Avenue. From D'Arcy Avenue, I moved to Prairie Avenue and Theodore, and now I'm living at 821 Woods Avenue for the last 26 years.

GUARDIOLA: How about your education, Jim? What school did you go to?

CHULLY: I went to Lincoln School and Central. I graduated in eighth grade. That's as far as I went in school cause I had to go to work.

GUARDIOLA: How was the schools then in those days?

CHULLY: In those days schools -- everyone had their things to do and everybody was more courteous than they are today. Today they aren't as courteous as they were years ago when we went to school.

GUARDIOLA: How did you get back and forth to school?

CHULLY: Back and forth? We used to walk -- four miles down and four miles back at noon, and four miles back to school and home. That was 16 miles a day we walked. No transportation.

GUARDIOLA: How were the teachers?

CHULLY: Teachers in them days -- I would say they were very high-class teachers, and very good. You had to do as they said; you done it. Today they don't do those things.

GUARDIOLA: How was their salaries? How were they paid? Was their

salary high or low, or. . .?

CHULLY: The teachers wasn't making too much money in those days.

GUARDIOLA: No? How about your schools? How were they -- what activities did they have? Did they have any at all?

CHULLY: Well, we had football, basketball, and art. In them days, well, we had basketball teams, but they're not to compare with the teams we have today. We never played outside. We played mostly the school.

GUARDIOLA: What about "after school" activities? Where'd you hang out at?

CHULLY: Well, after school, we used to go up to the Lincoln School grounds up at Heggie Field and used to play in the field and play baseball up there.

GUARDIOLA: Is that where everybody used to hang out?

CHULLY: In them days we had our own bunch that we used to play with, right from our own neighborhood, and we got along very good.

GUARDIOLA: Could you recall any historical events that happened -- you know, like things that happened when you were in school or were working? Like crime, or any big things that happened to anybody?

CHULLY: Well, let's see now. I do remember when Warden Ragen was killed[1] by these seven convicts and they escaped from the Stateville Peniteniary on Collins Street, and then they were taken to the county jail. They were caught and in the county jail they tried to get away again, and three of them got away and they never captured -- there's still one at large yet. He's over in Spain now. They never did bring him back.

GUARDIOLA: How about during Prohibition? What did you do? Did it have any effect with you?

CHULLY: No, no effect at all. We never thought of anything in them days. Drink like today.

GUARDIOLA: Do you remember any court cases they had in those days, or did they have any hangings or anything?

CHULLY: Well, let's see. I don't remember them. I should have gotten Lee Galasis to give me more of this stuff, you know. . . I could tell you this: I worked for the Herald-News, and I was in charge of the trucks.

GUARDIOLA: You were in charge of the trucks at the Herald-News?

CHULLY: Yes, when I was going to school. I worked for the Joliet Herald-News when I was going to school. After school I'd go there to work till six, seven o'clock at night, sometimes later -- it all depended -- and we used to have fellows that used to ride the truck. I was one of the drivers, and they would throw the bundles off. The route was from Joliet to Lemont and we'd throw the bundles off for the newsboys at their corner, wherever they were supposed to pick up their papers, and then when we'd come back in at night, we used to have to check all the trucks and maybe gas them up and get them ready for the next day.

GUARDIOLA: How about Joliet -- their transportation? How did they used to get back and forth -- do you remember? Did they have any horses or anything?

CHULLY: They had streetcars.

GUARDIOLA: How were those run?

CHULLY: They were run on a rail -- well, a trolley. And the seats in them days, the seats were on the side where you sat in. You didn't sit across. There was long seats in streetcars and they would haul you to -- like we'd go up to Dellwood Park to the dances and that -- when we got up to the years when we could go. And that's the way we went to any place. We didn't have any transportation outside of the streetcars.

GUARDIOLA: How about the growth of the city? How did it grow -- do you remember how it grew up?

CHULLY: Well, there was the steel mill. It was one of the main things in the town, but there was a lot of industries that developed ever since that. At one time there wasn't too much work for these people. There was only a few factories in the city of Joliet, and then as it later came on, there was Ruberiod, the brickyards, and Swanson, and what else was there? Another big one -- Farrell Manufacturing on Cass Street, and . . .

GUARDIOLA: Did you ever work in any of them places?

CHULLY: No, I didn't work in any of them.

GUARDIOLA: Where did you first start working? When you first started, did you start with the city, or . . .?

CHULLY: No, no. When I first started to work, I worked for my cousin delivering groceries. That would be after school. From there I went to the Herald-News. And I was there until I went to the Central Court Garage. I was in charge there and I was there seventeen years. From there I went to the State of Illinois. I worked on the state highway for

four years. Their equipment was very good, too. And then when we got through with the state, I went to work for the city. So I was off about two days or so. Then Mr. Rogers called me and he says, "Jim, do you have a job?" And I says, "No, I don't." "Well," he says, "You come down and see me and I'll take you over there."

GUARDIOLA: Who was this Mr. Rogers?

CHULLY: He was Highway Commissioner.

GUARDIOLA: Highway Commissioner of Joliet?

CHULLY: Township. Joliet Township. So he said, "I'll take you over to see Elmer." So Elmer told me to go down to the city hall and I went to work, and I worked there 25 years.

GUARDIOLA: I see. What was your first assignment for the city?

CHULLY: For the city? My first assignment was a helper on a truck.

GUARDIOLA: How many people were employed by the city at that time?

CHULLY: Oh, 20 to 25, at the most.

GUARDIOLA: What was your pay?

CHULLY: The pay was -- we made $4 an hour. That was big.

GUARDIOLA: At those times -- a way back when you started to work, it was $4 an hour? At the first?

CHULLY: Oh, no, when we first started, we was getting about $35 a week.

GUARDIOLA: Could you make it in those times with $35 a week?

CHULLY: Well, during the Depression and that, yes. We got by. And the kids was small and we got by pretty good. In fact; that's how I got started to buy my house.

GUARDIOLA: The Depression -- did that have any effect with you?

CHULLY: No. During the Depression, I never lost a day's work. I worked for the Central Court Garage at that time, for 17 years. No, it didn't effect me at all.

GUARDIOLA: How about unions? Did you have a union? When you first started for the city?

CHULLY: No, no union.

GUARDIOLA: When did it first come out?

CHULLY: Well, the union has been there now, I would say, for about twelve years -- fourteen years at the most.

GUARDIOLA: How did you get along without a union?

CHULLY: Well, things wasn't too good. They didn't have a union and they'd bring another fellow in and give him a better job because he was a friend of the politicians.

GUARDIOLA: Did the politicians have a lot to do with it?

CHULLY: Oh, yes, sure it had a lot to do with it. They'd bring these fellows in -- oh, you could be working for them for a year or two and this guy would come in and work one day and he'd get a better job than the men who worked there, and after we got the union, they couldn't do that. They'd have to start from the bottom and come up regardless of

where they came from. It didn't make no difference if it was the mayor's son or who it was. They had to start at the bottom.

GUARDIOLA: Was there a lot of family in the city then? Were they all family, or did they have a lot of outsiders?

CHULLY: No, they had a lot of family. Most of the workers, they had to be from the city of Joliet to work there, yes, otherwise they couldn't work.

GUARDIOLA: How much were your union wages then? Your union dues, I mean?

CHULLY: Our union dues? They were $3 a month when we started.

GUARDIOLA: Do you remember anything about the past elections or anything in Joliet? Who was elected mayor, and . . .?

CHULLY: Well, I remember Barber, one of the first ones. And Barr was a mayor, too, of the city of Joliet. Janke, I remember Art Janke.

GUARDIOLA: What kind of mayors were they -- were they good? Did they get along with the people or were they bad?

CHULLY: When the mayor had a commission form, they got along better than they do today because each one of them was elected to different departments and they took care of their own department and the mayor was the big boss. Today they don't have that. He's still there, but he isn't the big boss. He's only got one vote, see. At one time where the Penney's Clothing Store is today was a Central School and the Roosevelt School. Those buildings were torn down to make room for Penney's. Across the street was

Sears and Roebuck. They were on Ottawa Street and they moved from Ottawa, and they put this new store across from Penney's. Then they closed the street down there -- Crowley Avenue. Crowley used to go through to Scott Street. Now you have to go around the block to get onto Scott Street because they bought that piece of ground from the city and they closed it. And another building down the street is Robert Hall's. It's another building that was put in there after Sears.

GUARDIOLA: How was the city then? Was it rough, or did you have a hard time living in it?

CHULLY: No, the city was very good at that time. Nobody was bothered like today. You can't walk the streets today downtown that somebody don't hit you on the head, take what you got -- if you got 50¢ or a dollar, they'll take it away from you. Those days nobody bothered anybody. Nowadays, as far as these parking lots -- women park their cars in these lots, and they're bothered by these different men that come in and take their money away from them, knock them down, and the same way up in on the west side now -- all the way out from Wilcox Street to (Route) 52. At one time that was all farmland, and today there's more business on both sides all the way up -- there's your different ones -- your big stores like Honoiotes and then there was a bank built in there and all your eating places like Colonel's Chicken, and the Pontiac Garage was down on Joliet and they was built out there, and your Chevrolet Garage was built out there on Jefferson and Hammes. There's a Chinese Restaurant and there's a Saper's Garage, that's a new one. D'Amico's Place is a new place out there. The bowling alley, that was put in years back. The motel (Fenton's) was one of the first motels up on the west side and then

there's your big Leach Oil Company. They've been there for years in that same spot. They were originally in Joliet. And then this Fitzgerald's[2] Furniture built out there on the other side of the tracks. Now coming, well, there's still another garage there, Dodge Garage. That's new. Well, then your Eagle Store was built there, then Jefferson Shopping Center -- that's all new in that area. And the Red Wheel, and your gas stations on both sides. And you've got that Ponderosa, too. That's still another eating place. There's Dominick's. That's just been new in there, but the other part has been there a while. There's another restaurant there.

GUARDIOLA: You didn't have any of these restaurants or anything back then, huh?

CHULLY: No. From I-55 into Joliet today there is 45 restaurants on both sides of the road. At that time there was only about five or six, and that was downtown.

GUARDIOLA: Where did everybody go eat then? Was there a favorite, one that was the favorite?

CHULLY: Well, there was the Rialto Cafeteria. That was below the theater.

GUARDIOLA: Was that a favorite of everybody? How was the food there?

CHULLY: The food was good.

GUARDIOLA: Was it expensive, or was it . . .?

CHULLY: No, in them days it wasn't expensive. You probably got a meal for a dollar or a dollar and a quarter. Everything. And then your Knights of Columbus was built out there, too. That's a new one. They used to be in Joliet. They were up on Plainfield and Mason Avenue. Then they built a new building up there on West Jefferson.

GUARDIOLA: What was the population at Joliet then -- can you remember?

CHULLY: At that time I don't think it was over twenty-some thousand..

GUARDIOLA: Twenty-some thousand, huh? What was the majority in there -- Irish, Polish?

CHULLY: Well, there was quite a few Irish, and Italians, and Polish, and Scotch. There were not too many colored then at that time. No.

GUARDIOLA: About how many -- could you remember about how many coloreds there were?

CHULLY: Well, at that time I wouldn't say there were over . . . Oh, less than five to six hundred.

GUARDIOLA: You didn't have any trouble with them?

CHULLY: No trouble at all.

GUARDIOLA: How about when you went to school -- to bring it back up -- did you ever have any problems in school with the colored or anything?

CHULLY: We didn't have any problem with the colored in school at all. In fact, some of them were better than the white, at that time. They didn't bother anybody. They knew their place at that time, and if they could do you any good, they would do it for you. They didn't want to

bother with you, they wouldn't even say nothing, they would just walk away from you.

GUARDIOLA: How about in political parties -- who ran the city?

CHULLY: As far as the city election, there was no party. Your township and state election and for president, then you had two parties, you had the Democrats and the Republican Party, and so in the primary you'd have to call for your ballot, but like the city election, you never had -- You'd just go there and you'd vote for whoever you wanted to vote for -- there was no party.

GUARDIOLA: Well, who ran the city then -- was there a certain . . .?

CHULLY: Oh, we had Republican mayors and we had Democrat mayors. Both. Now Barber and Barr -- Barr was our State Senator; he was down there for 48 years in the Senate, but he was elected mayor of Joliet first, and after that he ran for this seat, but he was 48 years down there, one of the oldest senators in Congress. Barr. And we had, let's see -- Mayor Janke, Hennessy,Berlinsky, and Keck in there now.

GUARDIOLA: Jim, as I was asking you about these mayors, how did they run the city -- what did they do for the city?

CHULLY: Well, they come along and did different projects, like Mayor Berlinsky, for one, he was in there twelve years. He put all of these disposal plants in and got the rest of the bridges. And another thing -- we never had no trucks at the time till Mayor Berlinsky came in and then we got started getting some new equipment in there. We were going around with some old jalopy trucks that wouldn't even run.

GUARDIOLA: So he's one of the mayors that brought in the trucks and some of the equipment that we have now? How about these other mayors -- did they ever help the employees to improve the city?

CHULLY: Well, at that time, there was no union. You couldn't get nothing out of them. You were lucky you were working, see. If you said too much, they'd throw you out. You'd be out of a job, but fast. So then after we got the union, we couldn't do that, see. And just like this Civil Service, it didn't mean nothing. it came in after, but it didn't mean nothing. If you didn't have the union, there wouldn't be nothing.

GUARDIOLA: Civil Service -- what did they bring the Civil Service in for?

CHULLY: Well, so in case they changed whoever was running the city, if they didn't want you, they could get rid of you, just like the state. But with Civil Service, they've got to -- as long as you had the union, they couldn't throw you out. It's a lot different today than it was years ago. And another thing, Mayor Janke -- he did a lot of -- well, in fact, Mayor Berlinsky was the one that did a lot of the pavement in the city of Joliet -- the improvement of the streets.

GUARDIOLA: What were the streets -- were they made like they are today, or were they different?

CHULLY: No. Some of the streets were made out of brick, wooden blocks, even. Collins Street was wooden blocks.

GUARDIOLA: How far were the blocks?

CHULLY: Well, they used to run from town -- Cass Street down to Collins

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Street to this side of the penitentiary. They were creasote blocks. They were four by four, and they were laid in on sand.

GUARDIOLA: Did you have as much problems with these streets then as you do now?

CHULLY: Well, in them days, we didn't have the traffic -- very little cars in them days. When I was going to school and back, if a fellow had a car, he was well-to-do.

GUARDIOLA: Bricks -- where did you get the bricks from?

CHULLY: Well, they were bought from out of town. They were not made in Joliet. Some outfit made them out of town and they bought them through them. And then like the governor, even, when Anderson was governor, he had some interest in a brick factory and they were making roads out of bricks, but they wouldn't stay on account of the traffic started to get heavier and them big trucks was bouncing and knocking them out -- popping them right out -- the heavy traffic. They was all right as far as the cars, but when they started getting that heavy traffic of them big semi's, they didn't hold up worth a darn and they had to tear them all out -- the brick -- and put in all new cement and put blacktop on top of it.

GUARDIOLA: How many persons were employed by the city in those times -- that used to work on the streets -- do you remember?

CHULLY: Well, when I started, I wouldn't say over 20 to 25.

GUARDIOLA: How much area would you have to cover?

CHULLY: Well, the city wasn't that big at the time. It wasn't that big.

GUARDIOLA: Did you have to clean the streets of the city?

CHULLY: Oh, yes.

GUARDIOLA: How were they cleaned?

CHULLY: At first you used to go around with a big garbage can with two wheels on it, and a broom and a shovel to clean them. Then they started buying a sweeper. They bought a sweeper from the Elgin Company in Elgin, Illinois; they only had one at the time, and then we got two. There was a fellow by the name of Hennessy and the other fellow's name was Dick Swanson, the operator. Then they started sweeping the streets, but we never had to go way out this way before -- no -- that was outside the city.

GUARDIOLA: How about when there was a big storm -- did you have to plow the streets in the city, or how were they plowed?

CHULLY: Well, a lot of it was -- they didn't have too -- in fact, around the corners of the sidewalks we used to have to shovel that stuff to get it off, yes. But they didn't have too many snowplows at that time. I don't think we had . . . We'll, the town wasn't that big, see.

GUARDIOLA: Jim, how about the lights on the street -- were the streets lighted, or were they dark at all times?

CHULLY: They were lit, but the lights weren't too good in them days. There was no traffic lights in them days, and as far as the lighting is concerned, if you could see five, six feet ahead of you, you were lucky. The lights were awful dim. They were hanging from the pole, very small lights; it's not to compare with the lights we have in the city of

Joliet today. Why you can see -- the town's lit up. Geez! Years ago, you couldn't see nothing. And it improved the city a lot by having these lights. And that was put in by Mayor Berlinsky, too. And today -- it's altogether different downtown. You can walk around, but years ago there wasn't too much as far as people walking around the city at night downtown. There was no light compared with today.

GUARDIOLA: Would you say that the city has improved a lot?

CHULLY: Yes, I would say the city has improved. I would say about 80% or more.

GUARDIOLA: By which ways -- would you tell me -- which ways did it improve?

CHULLY: Well, we've had the street program improved a lot. It could be a lot better. Your light system is a lot better. We've got bridges today -- that was a horse-and-buggy days that went across them bridges in them days in Joliet. These are all new bridges that was put in by the Mayor Hennessy. And most of your streets, you have quite a few streets on the outskirts that are not paved, but they're talking about re-paving them in time to come -- but they haven't gotten to them yet.

GUARDIOLA: Okay, you're talking about Mayor Hennessy -- what kind of a mayor was he?

CHULLY: Mayor Hennessy was a very nice man, and he was very strict. And when he wanted things done, he wanted things done right, otherwise he'd let you know about it.

GUARDIOLA: How long was he in office?

CHULLY: Mayor Hennessy was in there eight years.

GUARDIOLA: He didn't run after the eight years?

CHULLY: No, he didn't run.

GUARDIOLA: How did the people like this mayor?

CHULLY: They liked him very well. And another thing that he did, was his son was helping out with his dad and his dad told him, "What I tell you to do, I want done. It means you and it means everybody else." And Mayor Hennessy was very nice to all the people. When they'd call him on the phone, to city hall, the telephone operator there would say, "There's a call for you, Mayor," and he'd say, "Put them on the line." He'd talk to them and wanted to know what was their trouble and say this isn't right or that isn't right, and can't that be improved , and "time to come, we'll take care of it, but we can't do everything at one time."

GUARDIOLA: How did he help the city improve?

CHULLY: Well, he was the mayor that the bridges was put in by?

GUARDIOLA: The bridges were put in by him?

CHULLY: Yes, Mayor Hennessy. His dad was the one that had put them in, not Jim Hennessy -- his father. Well, there wasn't too much improvement in them days. In fact, they didn't have no City Hall. They were renting off, up in the Joliet National Bank Building. Then from there they went to the Library. And they finally got this building down there. They built that building at Jefferson and Joliet (Streets) -- City Hall -- but at one time they were working off the Library, upstairs there. They had a very small space up there.

GUARDIOLA: How were the hospitals in those days?

CHULLY: The hospitals were small -- they weren't too large. They kept adding on as they developed them. Like St. Joseph's Hospital -- it was up here on Broadway.

GUARDIOLA: How many hospitals were there?

CHULLY: Two -- Silver Cross and St. Joe's -- only two.

GUARDIOLA: Were they as crowded then as they are today, or . . .?

CHULLY: No. They wasn't as crowded as today in them days, no.

GUARDIOLA: So do you feel that the city has gone forward a lot since them days?

CHULLY: Yes, I do. I think they've improved a lot, in every way.

GUARDIOLA: How about how you're living here -- what do you think of Joliet?

CHULLY: I think Joliet is a very nice town. I've enjoyed it ever since I've lived in Joliet. I was born and raised in Joliet.

GUARDIOLA: Is that all you've got to say about your past history, Jim?

CHULLY: Well, I don't know of anything else right off hand now.

GUARDIOLA: Okay, Jim. I'd like to take this opportunity now to thank you for letting me take up some of your time in helping me with this project.

FOOTNOTES

[1]This is probably a reference to something which occurred at the County Jail. Warden Ragen retired from Stateville Prison in 1961 and died on September 22, 1971.

[2]Fitzgerald's Furniture Store is located at 101 E. Clinton Street. The store on Jefferson Street was Fitz-Gibbons, and they went out of business in approximately 1975.

INDEX

Anderson, Governor, 18
art, 7
autos, 18

Barber, Mayor, 12, 16
Barr, Mayor and State Senator, 12, 16
baseball, 7
basketball, 7
Berlinsky, Mayor, 16,17,20
blacks, 15
bowling alley, 13
bricks, 17
brick yards, 19
bridges, 5, 16, 20, 21
Broadway Street, 22

Cass Street, 9, 17
Central Court Garage,9, 11
Central School, 6, 12
Chevrolet Garage, (Jacob's), 13
Chinese Restaurant, (Tien Tsin), 13
city hall, 10, 21
Civil Service, 17
Collins Street, 7, 17
Colonel's Chicken, 13
commission form of government, 12
Congress (of IL), 16
convicts, 7
county jail, 7
Crowley Avenue, 13

D'Amico's (West), 13
dances, 9
D'Arcy Avenue, 6
Dellwood Park, 9
Democratic Party, 16
Depression, 11
disposal plants, 16
Dodge Garage, (T. Benson's), 14
Dominick's, (grocery store), 14
driver(s), 8

Eagle Store, 14
east side, 5
elections, 12, 16
Elgin Company, 19

factories, 9
farmland, 13
Farrell Manufacturing, 9
Fenton's Motel, 13
Fitzgerald's Furniture, 14
football, 17
Florence Avenue, 6

Galasis, Lee, 8

Hammes Avenue, 13
hangings, 8
Heggie Field, 7
Hennessy, city worker, 19
Hennessy, Mayor, 5,16,20,21
Herald-News, (The Joliet), 8
Highway Department, (State), 19
Honiotes Market, 13
horses, 8
hospitals, 22

Illinois, State of, 9, 10
industries, 9
Irish, the, 15
Italians, the, 15

Janke, Art, Mayor, 12,16,17
Jefferson (Square) Shopping Center, 14
Jefferson Street, 13, 15, 21
Joliet, City of, 5, 8-10, 12-22
Joliet National Bank Building, 21
Joliet Street, 13,14, 21
Joliet Township, 10

Keck, Mayor, 16
Knights of Columbus, 15

Leach Oil Company, 14
Lemont, IL, 8
Library, (Joliet), 21
lighting (streets), 19
Lincoln School, 6

Mason Avenue, 15
mayors, 5, 12, 16-17
Meeker Avenue,5

neighborhood, 5-7
news boys, 8

Ottawa Street, 13

penitentiary, 18

Penney's, (J. C.) Clothing Store, 12, 13
Plainfield Road, 15
Polish, the, 15
political parties, 16
politicians, 11
Ponderosa, the, 14
Pontiac Garage, B. Adams), 13
Prairie Avenue, 6
Prohibition, 8

Ragen, Joe, Warden, 7
Red Wheel, the, 14
Republican Party, 16
Robert Hall's, 13
Rogers, Mr. highway commissioner, 10
Roosevelt School, 12
Route I-55, 14
Route 52, 13
Ruberoid Company, 9
Ruby Street Bridge, 5

St. Joseph's Hospital, 22
salaries, 6, 10
Saper's (Chrysler) Garage, 13
school activities, 7
schools, 6, 12,15
Scotch, the, 15
Scott Street, 13
Sears and Roebuck, 13
Silver Cross Hospital, 22
snowplows, 5, 19
Spain, 7
spreader, 5
Stateville Penitentiary, 7
steel mill, 9
streets, upkeep of, 17-19
streetcars, 8-9
Swanson Company, 9
Swanson, Dick, city worker, 9

teachers, 6, 8
Theodore Street, 6
transportation, 6
trolley, 9
truck(s), 5, 8, 16, 18

union dues, 12
union, (the labor), 11, 17
Wilcox Street, 13
wooden blocks, 17
Woods Avenue, 6

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